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ABSTRACT

Performance contracting offers advantages over traditional grading in that it provides for individualization of instruction, provides for measureable goals and objectives, and allows for individual growth rates. Two methods of performance contracting are possible; the first type calls for the student to determine what grade they desire for the course, and the second involves writing completely different behavioral objectives and designing separate evaluation criteria for the grades "A," "B," and "C" in a particular course. With both methods, the students possess specific products of their learning accomplishments. (DS)

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PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING IN HEALTH EDUCATION

by

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Grading and marking can be a difficult task in a health education course. The health educator questions, for example, what really is important that should be included within a grading scheme and what really is a fair grading scheme for all involved parties which measures learning? Then questions arise as to what specific criteria should be utilized, how the criteria are to be utilized or applied, and for what outcomes are the criteria to be applied?

Marks or grades for example can serve several different purposes. They can serve as a vehicle for informing the students as to how their individual work compares to other students work within the same subject area at this particular time. Also grades or marks can indicate to the parents their child's strengths and weaknesses in the total educational program of a school. Perhaps the parents can thus encourage their child to attempt to try a little harder and spend some extra time and effort in particular areas of weaknesses, but at the same time to maintain success in areas or courses in which they are excelling. Lastly, grades and marks can be used by school personnel as one source to provide data in order to plan for individual programs of instruction, which allow each student to grow and mature to their upmost. Another use of grades or marks might be for vocational counseling, however, one might seriously question guidance counselors using these criteria as the only basis for

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vocational counseling. What about the late developers, for example?

Marks and grades, at times, also encourage cheating, anxiety, dishonesty, hostility, and poor mental health. Negative attitudes can be encouraged by constant failures, as well as negative patterns related to learning - striving for a mark rather than learning something. However, according to Ebel, "there is nothing wrong with encouraging students to work for high marks if marks are valid measures of achievement."[1] In this manner, marks or grades are based on known specific criteria which are relatively measureable, and criteria for grading/marking are known by all involved parties.

Advantages of Performance Contracting

Performance contracts allow for various academic levels to be serviced within a classroom via individualization of instruction. Specific groups and individuals may require optional assignments that are designed for the abilities and student's predetermined desired grade for the course/unit. Thus the exceptional student and the slow learner each have objectives that can challenge them and provide, hopefully, for some real growth and learning. Traditional group lectures and discussions are aimed at the "normal" student of which they may not be a part. Students then can operate at their own level and pace most suitable to their needs.

In addition, performance contracts are self-pacing - the individual students can learn as quickly or as slowly as they are capable. Students can work independently or in combination with other students who can pace themselves together.

[1]J. Stanley and K. Hopkins. Educational and Psychological Measurements and Evaluation. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972, 307.

The contract requires each person to be responsible for what is to be learned. Students can be provided various instructional media to become acquainted with specific information which can facilitate the completion of course objectives. However, while working with this system, the teacher still must provide materials, guidance, mini-lectures, and learning activities as needed, in order to remain the facilitator of learning.

Lastly, performance contracts can reduce frustration and anxiety in grading. In traditional classrooms, each student is expected to complete the same amount of work in a similar time period, and therefore each person is graded in comparison to the total group. These factors can create unnecessary pressures and tensions for the student, which may hinder learning. Students need to be evaluated in comparison to their own achievement and the learner may resent superior performance in others, chastise themselves for errors, reinforce a poor self-image, lose confidence in their abilities to earn good grades and be tempted to cheat in order to earn a better grade. The contract enables students to work to their potential and be rewarded for their efforts regardless of the performance of other students. Resulting will be a more positive self-concept, the improvement of communication skills, and an application of the process of decision-making.

Construction of Performance Contracts

In designing performance contracts many factors must be considered. Examples of important considerations are student knowledge levels, health interests, the time interval provided for the unit, available resources (media, learning activities), students/parents value structure, school

administration values toward health and teaching methodologies, and most important, the perceived student abilities. Basically, it is a time-consuming process and begins with the construction of measureable behavioral objectives that specify:

1. What the student must learn or do.
2. How the student can demonstrate the material learned (action verb) to actualize the objective.
3. To what degree of proficiency the student must obtain to be judged successful.

Various media resource alternatives should be provided, for example, a variety of textbooks and materials should be available in order to allow for various reading levels. In addition, some alternative objectives generally are provided, meaning some objectives are required of everyone, while students may select activities from another series of objectives.

In practice, two different methods of performance contracting are possible. The first type of performance contracting calls for the student to determine what grade they desire for the unit/course. Specific group and individual activities are written in the form of behavioral objectives for the letter grades of A, B, and C. If the student desired an A for the unit, they would have to do all of the work for the A, B, and C contracts; if the student desired a grade of B, they had to do all the work for the B and C contracts and; if they desired a grade of C, they had to only complete the work for the C contract. Failure to complete the contract work within a given time period, resulted either in a grade of F or one grade lower than what the student had contracted for.

The other system of performance contracting basically is writing

completely different behavioral objectives and designing separation evaluation criteria for the grades of A, B, and C in a particular unit. This second system of performance contracting is a little more difficult to actualize since so many students might be going off in too many directions for the teacher to handle - in the final analysis, the choice of systems rests with the type and quality of students and the abilities and skills of the health educator.

Brief additional highlights of the system of performance contracting are:

1. Students actually sign for a grade along with the teacher.
2. Large group, small group and individual activities are included at each level of grading.
3. Attendance can be written into the contract.
4. Higher cognitive level activities can be provided, i.e., propose a plan to reduce environmental pollution or illustrate examples of water pollution within the community.
5. A mini-lecture time allows the opportunity to present new information and answer general questions.
6. A student can redue individual objectives until acceptable under the established evaluation criteria - includes all written tests.
7. Written tests receive less emphasis, since other activities/projects can provide additional sources for evaluation and grading.
8. Worksheets are provided for processing audio-visuals - generally two different reading levels are provided.

Disadvantages of Performance Contracting

Performance contracting is a deviation from the traditional methods

of learning, grading and marking. Some individuals find it extemely difficult to move to something new and different than what has proven successful in the past. However, with school health education being rather young does it really have that many traditions that cannot be broken? The answer to this question varies from differing viewpoints, experiences, backgrounds and philosophies of education.

In addition, performance contracting cannot be carried out successfully by every health educator. It requires a tremendous amount of teacher time to organize, to conduct, and to evaluate. Educators need to be knowledgeable of the skills, abilities, needs, and interests of their pupils, as well as have access to a variety of resource materials/media. Support to undertake the methodology must be obtained from the school administration, and many administrators today still maintain that traditional methods of education are superior.

Also grades for health courses are not gained solely in the traditional manner of testing. Many individuals feel a paper/pencil test is the most precise and desirable method of evaluation of learning and everything should be carried out in an extremely scientific/precise manner. Perhaps it should be for research/publication, but the question arises, of what and whom are the schools really for?

The last disadvantage is related to specific criteria designed to measure the fulfillment of the objectives. Since generally the evaluation criteria are teacher constructed and teacher evaluated, the criteria may not be of the highest possible quality. Biases related to evaluation can be prevalent such as various personalities for example, and health educators should attempt to compensate for such. All the health educators

can do is give it their best and strive for high quality objective fulfillment.

In summary, the performance contract method of grading provides for individualization of instruction, provides for measureable goals and objectives, allows for individual growth rates, and most important, the students possess specific products of their learning accomplishments.

SOURCES:

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